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Quarterly Journal of Science, *January* (London).—Signor Cocchi announces the discovery of a human skull in the lower beds of the Lower Post-pliocene strata in Italy. This lower portion consists of lacustrine clays of great thickness, with layers of peat towards its superior margin; it contains bones of the Mammoth (*Elephas primigenius*), *Cervus euryceros*, *Bison priscus*, and a species (probably new) of the Horse, *Equus;* it has also yielded stone implements and a human cranium, the latter from the plain of the Aretino. Whether this deposit be termed Lower Post-pliocene, or anything else, there seems little room for doubt that the skull was imbedded contemporaneously with the remains of the Mammoth, etc., and that Man lived in Italy contemporaneously with those animals.—The term *Gregarinæ* applied to the Chignon Fungus (see Naturalist, vol. 1, p. 379), is most inappropriate, as is admitted both by Drs. Fox and Beigel. It is the *Pleurococcus Beigelii.* The *Gregarinæ* are indubitably animals, and are internal parasites.

NATURAL HISTORY MISCELLANY.

BOTANY.

Vitality of Seeds.—Dr. Gray, in his "How Plants Grow," says, "The stories of seeds growing, which have been preserved for two or more thousand years with Egyptian mummies, are not to be believed." M. Figuier, in his work on "The Vegetable World," also cautions his readers against accepting certain statements of earlier writers to the effect that various seeds have been known to germinate after having been deposited in Roman and Celtic tombs nearly two thousand years. He then says, "We must not forget to speak of those wonderful seeds of wheat found in the tombs of ancient Egypt. It is now acknowledged that in this affair some one must have abused the confidence and credulity of the travellers. A variety of wheat called Mummy-wheat is common, it is true, among farmers; but no authentic fact justifies its name." From a paper recently drawn up by the Rev. Dr. Marks, of Meadville, Pa., at the request of a member of "The Natural History Society of the Meadville Theological School," I condense the following statement, using as far as possible the language of the original paper.

When Dr. Marks was in Thebes, in the winter of 1856, the Arabs were dragging forth from the mummy-pits great numbers of mummies. He saw them tear off the linen wrappings, in the folds of which were many pieces of papyrus, covered with Coptic characters. Very often in the mummies' hands were found grains of wheat, dura, flax, and the nut of the palm-tree. From the hand of one was thrown out the seed-cup of a rose, which he picked up and brought away with him. This he subsequently gave, while residing at Quincy, Ill., to Mrs. Gov. Wood. On opening the seed-cup, she found several seeds, which she planted in a flower-pot, in her green-house. In the course of three weeks, two of these germinated, and, the next year, blossomed, producing a pink single rose, unlike any American variety with which they were acquainted. The estimated age of the mummy, from which the seed-cup was taken, was twenty-five hundred years.

Dr. Marks has in his possession some seeds of the *dura* (which he supposes to be the *corn* spoken of in the Book of Genesis), obtained by him from Egyptian mummies; but he has never tested their vitality. He testifies, however, to the fact of some dura seeds having been found in the hand of a mummy unrolled at Springfield, Ill., a few years since, which were planted by the Rev. Albert Hale, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in that city, and which produced the same year several full-grown stalks, as large as Indian corn, and covered over with clusters of fruit which matured.

As throwing some light on the causes of this wonderful preservation of vitality, Dr. Marks states that the mummy-pits are perfectly dry, being situated from three to five hundred feet above the level of the Nile, and cut out of the rock of the mountain, which is a soft calcareous limestone. The pits are never either cold or damp.—GEO. L. CARY.

[If these seeds had been only thirty or forty years old, their prompt germination, although unlikely (for those who are in the habit of trying old seeds know how difficult it is to make any old seeds germinate), would be promptly believed upon this evidence. But marvels are to be credited only upon more rigid scrutiny. Scientific men will think it far more probable that some mistake has occurred in respect to the seeds, or deception by the Arabs, than that seeds 2,500 old actually grew.—A. G.]

BEES VS. FRUIT.—It is high time, we may add, that the *Peabody Academy of Science* were in full operation in Essex County, when one of its towns votes to "abate the nuisance" of bees, on the ground that they are injurious to fruit!

As to the nectar of the red clover being out of the reach of the honey-bee, it may be asked whether this be the case with the second crop, in which the flowers are generally rather smaller. The much better seeding of the second crop of red clover is thought to be owing to the greater abundance of bumble-bees in the latter part of summer.—A. GRAY.

THE SUN-DEW, A FLY-TRAP.—Mr. Millington has well described, in the April number, the phenomenon of fly-catching by the Sun-dew, and his wholly original observations show that he has perfectly comprehended these curious facts. That the *Drosera* catches flies in this way was, however, known to botanists and recorded in botanical works more than half a century ago. But the statement attracted little attention, and finally nearly died out of the books. It was re-discovered by Mr. Darwin, in England, perhaps a dozen years ago, but I know not whether his observations are published, except by a brief allusion in the Gardeners' Chronicle. He found, as did Mr. Millington, that while the bristles will close upon a bit of raw meat, they are not sensitive to an inorganic body; yet that they are so to a bit of carbonate of ammonia. Mr. Darwin followed up this subject by some very interesting observations and experiments upon the Venus Fly-trap, *Dionœa*, which, with some recent ones made in this country, may soon be published. — A. GRAY.

FLOWERING OF HEPATICA TRILOBA. — March 12th, I found three *Hepaticas* in blossom, and on March 29th, I gathered quite a handful. — J. H. SEARS, *Danvers, Mass.*

ZOÖLOGY.

INSTANCES OF ALBINISM AMONG OUR BIRDS. — In a recent number of the NATURALIST, a correspondent mentions a "Singular Variety" of the Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*). His specimen is an example of the partial albinism which is, perhaps, not so rare among birds as it is generally supposed to be. When we remember what an extremely small percentage of individuals of any species comes under observation, the wonder rather is, that so many albinos are found. In the course of a few seasons' collecting, I have met with the following instances of albinism, partial or complete.

Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*). A specimen shot in the fall has the wings and tail mostly white, and all the upper parts patched here and there with white.

Western Snow-bird (*Junco Oregonus*). A specimen shot at Fort Whipple, Arizona, Dec. 12, 1864, has a large, somewhat circular, pure white spot on the throat, distinctly defined against the surrounding dark colors. The plumage is otherwise perfectly normal.

Blue bird (*Sialia sialis*). A curious specimen, with a triangular white spot on the back of the neck; otherwise perfectly normal in plumage. I have seen this species entirely snow-white, with (probably) pink eyes, and flesh-colored bill and feet.

Robin (*Turdus migratorius*). With a large white spot on each side of the head, formed by the enlargement and coalescence of the white spots which occur normally about the eyes. The robin also occurs in snow-white plumage.

Bank Swallow (*Cotyle riparia*). With the upper parts delicate pale silvery gray; the under parts pure white, as usual. This is the only instance I have met with of albinism in this bird.

Blue Yellow-backed Warbler (*Parula Americana*). This is, in some respects, the most curious example of partial albinism I have ever seen, occurring in a family of birds little liable to this abnormity. The entire plumage is mottled and patched with white, the natural colors appearing in the spaces between the white areas.